archive.today
webpage capture
Saved from https://indyweek.com/news/culture/music/roman-candle-s-oh-tall-tree-ear/ search
no other snapshots from this url
Redirected from https://indyweek.com/music/roman-candle-s-oh-tall-tree-ear/
no other snapshots from this url
All snapshots from host indyweek.com
8 May 2026 23:56:47 UTC
Webpage Screenshot
share download .zip report bug or abuse Buy me a coffee

MUSIC

Roman Candle's Oh Tall Tree in the Ear

(Carnival Recording Company)

by Grayson Haver Currin May 6, 2009

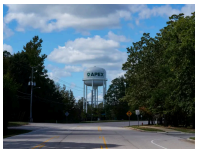
Along with the resplendent textures, radiant melodies and irrepressible ebullience that have united the output of Nashville-via-Chapel Hill-via-Wilkesboro band Roman Candle, the act's other especially pervasive feature is persistence. After all, *Oh Tall Tree in the Ear*, the band's glowing and ambitious second LP, is the sort of record that shouldn't exist.

As a young Chapel Hill act writing songs while going to school, Logan and Skip Matheny were drafted by an NFL player to be an early act on his well-funded upstart label. The band's roughly recorded debut did well, ultimately earning Roman Candle a deal with Disney-propped major Hollywood Records. They re-recorded the debut and awaited its release as *The Wee Hours Revue*. But

LATEST

BOOKS
The Epic Real-Life Friendship Behind an Acclaimed Novel

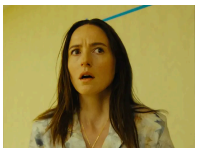
PLACE
Outside the Box

NEWS
Tree Canopy Loss in Apex is Among the Highest in Wake County. Now the Town is Considering New Protections.


NEWS
Proposed WakeMed-Atrium Deal Prompts Calls for Transparency

NEWS
How the Lack of a State Budget Is Hitting Durham County

CULTURE
Incoming! Professional Shoplifters, Liminal Spaces, and Avenging Sheep



Hollywood passed, and V2the large independent label owned by entertainment mogul Richard Bransonpurchased the record's rights and finally released it in the summer of 2006. There was some acclaim, some touring; then, another catastrophe: V2 dropped most acts and almost all of its music business. Ostensibly cursed, Roman Candle could claim two stellar versions of one record, neither backed by an interested label. What could be next? Cut your losses and get a job, right?

By then, though, the resilient core of Roman Candle was bound by family, label support or no. Logan and Skip were brothers of the N.C. mountains, and Timshel Matheny, a piano player and poet, married Skip in 1998. The trio persevered in Nahville, leaving some of its trusty sidemen back in Chapel Hill. They wrote and recorded, eventually landing with Music City producer Jason Lehning. Now, three years later, Roman Candle's finally released *Tall Tree*, a powerful 11-track follow-up that, somehow, finds the strong esprit Roman Candle boasted when fame seemed in sight not only intact but improved upon. Skip appears to have more fun singing than anyone you've ever heard, whether exclaiming in praise of the bird's song on opener "Eden Was a Garden" or extolling the anxiety of a crush in the infectious "A Heartbeat." Logan's warm electronic manipulations and casually perfect beats sit exactly where they should, while Timshel's luxuriating keyboard motifs alternate between drifts of nuance and the weight of ballast. All together, the Mathenys circumscribe an unlikely apex of Britpop and alt.country, big acoustic chords and strong Southern accents forming anthems that stick around the time of the second spin. FM radio parable and critique "Why Modern Radio is A-OK" chugs and smiles. Roman Candle turns a 14-line English sonnet into a young man's reverie on "Sonnet 46." "I Was a Fool," a coming-of-age, finding-a-soulmate paean, speeds and slows along a waltz's basic structure. Skip mines lyrical aphorisms ("The last thing we'll ever leave is a love song for this vacant room") and rich details (British hotels, N.C. folk singer Merle Watson, old Datsuns), connecting it all beneath refrains that stretch like the biggest canvases.

Get the *INDY* Daily.

Join 24,000 of your neighbors and stay in tune with the Triangle.

Email Address Sign up

Skip enters the record's centerpiece, "Big Lights," solo, a lonely, lost singer strumming an acoustic guitar and asking for help. With each new verse and chorus, Timshel and Logan add an instrument, hopping behind his back and pushing him into a rock climax that suggests Sigur Ros' perfect splendor. They

march as a unit, a family sticking together through the thick of big record labels or the thin of a small Nashville indie. The song is the best conquest, and, on *Tall Tree*, Roman Candle nails nearly all of them.

To be faithful to *Tall Tree*'s central conceitthat, compared to the wonderful permanence and effect of a great tune, time is wasteful in its hasteRoman Candle's time at the threshold of the Next Big Thing, The Last Great American Rock Band might have passed. The band's getting older, settling into different life roles. But *Tall Tree* is an album of rich ideas and generous execution. All told, it's a marvelous, unique tale of resolve and results from any bandlet alone one that had to fight this hard to get it made.

Roman Candle plays a release party at Cat's Cradle Saturday, May 9, at 9 p.m. Keegan DeWitt and The Deep Vibration open the $8-$10 show.

Grayson Haver Currin

grayson-haver-currin@indyweek.com

Bio: Grayson Haver Currin was the music editor of *INDY Week* and the co-director of Hopscotch Music Festival.Twitter: http://twitter.com/currincy

More by Grayson Haver Currin

Keep it free, keep it *INDY*.

Your support keeps the *INDY* free, fearless, and growing. Strengthen our journalism. Foster community.

JOIN THE CLUB.

Durham, NC 27702

919-666-7229

FIND A PAPER

© 2026 INDY Week, A Member of The Assembly Local Network

Powered by Newspack

100%